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ON CERTAIN INCIDENTS IN BEN JONSON'S LIFE

Bliss, in his edition of Wood's *Athenae Oxonienses*, III, 1254, printed a note to which students of Jonson have not, I think, paid sufficient attention. He there quotes from a book entitled: *The Relection of a Conference Touching the Reall Presence*, 1635, which contains a pamphlet previously published in 1632 by S. E. and called: *The Summe of a Conference Betwixt M. D. Smith Now B. of Chalcedon, and M. Dan. Featly Minister. About the Reall Presence. With the notes of S.E.*, etc. The quotation, which I take from the publication of 1635 in a slightly abridged form, runs as follows, pp. 4–5:

In the yeere 1612, Master Daniel Featlie being in France, ... there came to Paris one M. Knevet, halfe-brother to M. John Foord, an honest & vertuous Gentleman the[n] living in that Cittie.[1] This M. Knevet, being . . . . put in mind, that he was mistaken in the matter of Religion . . . . tould his brother (M. Foord) he would see one of ours defend it before M. Featlie . . . . Withall he acquainted M. Featlie with the business . . . . M. Featlie . . . . undertooke it. . . . . At leingth, upon the third of September, word was sent to M. D. Smith. . . . .

On the 4. of September there met at M. Knevets chamber, M. D. Smith, and M. Featly. With M. D. Smith came his cozen M. Rainer; & with M. Featly came one M. John Porie, who had beene a burgeois (as it was said) in the first Parlament in King James his time. There were also present M. John Foord, M. Thomas Rant, M. Ben: Jonson, M. Henrie Constable, and others; not English onlie, but also French, etc.

It seemed to me worth while to follow up the hint thus given. In 1630 Featly published his *Grand Sacrilege of the Church of Rome*, and pp. 285 ff. of that work are taken up with a pamphlet entitled: *The Summe and Substance of A Disputation Betweene M. Dan. Featly, Oponent, and D. Smith the younger, Respondent, (now by the Pope intitututuled* [sic] *Bishop of Chalcedon, and Ordinary of all England) At Paris. Sept. 4. 1612. Stylo Novo, touching the Reall Presence in the Sacrament. . . . 1630.* This contains the following passage, pp. 305–6:

In this Relation we have omitted of set purpose all D. Smiths by-discourses, together with his proofes of the maine, because they were against

[1] This cannot have been the dramatist, as an examination of his pedigree in Vivian's *Visitations of Devonshire* shows.

the third Law [i.e., agreement by which the disputation was to be conducted]. And M. Featly at this time tooke no notice of them in particular, but promised in generall to answer them all, when it came to his course to answer: Now he was bound by the Law onely to oppose, and D. Smith onely to give his answers, which are here truly set downe, most of them out of his owne writing, as wee depose, who were present at this Disputation.

I must willingly subscribe to the truth of that, which D. Smith did so voluntarily present to our eyes and eares; And for the rest, which is M. Featlies, none of the adverse party can take any just exception against it.

J. P.

I professe, that all things in this Narration delivered and quoted out of D. Smiths Autographie, are true out of my examination. And of the rest I remember the most, or all: neither can I suspect any part.

B. J.

Now J. P. and B. J. are John Pory and Benjamin Jonson, as is clear from S. E.'s list, and further proof of the identification will be seen in a moment. But who wrote the pamphlet? The phrase, "we have omitted," seems to suggest that J. P. and B. J. were jointly responsible; on the other hand, the language of the last paragraph seems to imply that the pamphlet, once written, was submitted to B. J. for examination. Both are clearly concerned in the composition of the first paragraph quoted. S. E. (*Relection*, p. 2) takes this pamphlet to be by Featly himself, and places little faith, apparently, in these attestations of accuracy, for he says, p. 3: ". . . . the Minister . . . . doth cite imperfectlie my Lords answers, putting words or peeces together at his pleasure, and sometimes adding: and obscuring the sence which in the Relation it selfe [i.e., Smith's MS] I find to be distinct and cleere." Let us look, however, a little farther.

Featly touches upon this pamphlet in his *Transubstantiation Exploded*, 1638. On p. 27 he attacks S. E. for his criticism thus: "In my booke (which he so nicknameth) a *great beame* is discovered *in the eye of the Romane Church;* in the relation of the conference appendant thereunto *a mote in your eye.*" The implication of this language is that Featly, though the author of the *Grand Sacrilege*, was not of the appended relation.

On p. 30 he says: ". . . . he hath flung a dart of Calumny at a Conference of mine signed and subscribed by two witnesses, both named by him, and acknowledged to be present at that disputation in Paris, Anno 1612." Here the language is vague, because Featly

is using the word "Conference" in two senses, that of the report of the conference and that of the conference itself. In the latter sense, the conference was his; in the former it may or may not have been. This passage, however, is of particular interest as placing beyond peradventure the identity of J. P. and B. J., since Jonson and Pory are the only two persons in S. E.'s list that have the right initials. There is, in other words, no question of the "others" who were present; J. P. and B. J. were "named" and "acknowledged."[1]

On p. 35: "I intreat the Reader to take notice that the Protestant relation of the Conference printed 1630, was taken out of the authenticall notes of both parties, and confirmed and subscribed by two that were present at the disputation." This passage tells us merely that whoever wrote the pamphlet had Featly's notes to work upon as well as Smith's.

Farther down on the same page is a more definite passage: "First, you charge me with the breach of I know not what condition, by making the Conference more publik then it should have beene. The two noters make mention but of three conditions or lawes made by the company, and assented unto by us before we exchanged any word. . . . ." Now the three conditions to be met by the disputants are stated literally at the very beginning of the pamphlet, so that the phrase, "the two noters," would seem to make J. P. and B. J. both responsible for the whole work, not of course for the material drawn from the notes of the disputants, but for the selection and arrangement of that material, for such explanatory and transitional matter as was necessary, and for the translation, as the notes were in Latin.

If we take a middle path, I think we may harmonize all of these statements, that is, if we assume that Pory wrote the pamphlet in consultation with Jonson, who, besides giving him some advice, examined his work and certified to its accuracy.

The facts just brought forth are not merely interesting in themselves, but they have an interesting bearing upon several points in Jonson's life. First, as to his journey to France. Although the passage quoted from the *Relection* has been in print for many years, all of the lives of Jonson say he went to France as governor of Raleigh's

[1] It is curious that in September 20, 1632, Pory should write to Puckering that he had supposed Ben Jonson was dead. When did the collaboration on this pamphlet actually take place?

son in 1613.[1] To be sure, this is the date given twice by Jonson in the *Conversations*. But here, on incontrovertible testimony, we find him in Paris in September, 1612. Either this was a separate visit to France, one of which no trace elsewhere exists, or his stay there began much earlier and lasted much longer that we have hitherto supposed. In either case, there is no contradiction involved. The incidents of which he speaks in the *Conversations* no doubt did happen in 1613. Or else we may suppose that he stayed in France during the greater part of that year, and that 1613 would occupy a larger place in his memory than 1612, so that, speaking loosely and casually, he might naturally say: "When I was in France in 1613."

Let us next consider the problem of the publication of the Folio of 1616. The belief of Fleay and Simpson[2] is that the Folio was to have been brought out in 1612 or 1613 and dedicated to Prince Henry, but that the death of that prince prevented the carrying out of the design. In support of this, Fleay points to the entry of the epigrams, S. R., May 15, 1612, the death of the prince in that year, the fact that in the epigrams and in the *Forest* we can discover no date certainly later than 1611 or 1612, the fact that the annotated masques are all earlier than that year, and that *Catiline*, 1611, is the latest play included. All of this is interesting, and of course correct as far as the dates are concerned and the intention to publish something at least in 1612. But how about the connection with Prince Henry? He did not die until November 6; the entry of the epigrams is on May 15. It is going a little far to invoke the death of the prince to explain the non-publication of a volume entered almost six months earlier. And if the epigrams had been intended to form part of a volume of "works" in 1612 or 1613, would they have been entered separately? Or is it likely that the other parts of that volume would have been entered separately as Fleay assumes? Or, as the epigrams come after the plays in the volume finally issued, why should they have been entered first? Doesn't the theory demand that the epigrams should come first, or that they should at least have a separate pagination? I submit that there is no *evidence* of an intention to

[1] The suggestion by Ward, II, 315, "or in the previous year, possibly on account of the cessation of all Court festivities by reason of the death of Henry Prince of Wales," was a pure guess due to Gifford.

[2] Cf. *Notes and Queries*, 9 s., V, 337.

publish in 1612 anything more than a volume of epigrams, and that there is no *evidence* connecting that volume with Prince Henry.

Now, why were the epigrams not published? Prince Henry died six months after the entry and there was plenty of time to get out the epigrams several times over in the interval. The reason probably lay in Jonson's absence from London. Suppose that he made an arrangement with Stepneth to print the epigrams about the beginning of May. The publisher immediately makes record of his right to publish the poems of the most talked-of writer of the day. But Jonson is very soon made governor of Raleigh's son, and compelled to go with him to Paris. Being Jonson, he says to the printer, "No publishing during my absence." (I hold firmly to the belief that he supervised the publication of the 1616 volume, in spite of the article by Van Dam and Stoffel in 1900.) His stay in Paris endures all of the remaining part of 1612 and perhaps the greater part of 1613, for we cannot trace him in London until Somerset's marriage in December, 1613, and even then not with certainty. When he returns his plans have changed, or perhaps the publisher's. Mr. Simpson himself suggests that Stepneth may have died at this time, and there is no evidence that he did any printing after that date. In any case there was a transfer of interest of some kind, and nothing was printed until 1616 when the volume appeared as we have it.

It may be asked how this explanation accounts for the fact that we can discover no date in the epigrams and *Forest* later than 1611. The answer is while it is true that we can not prove that any one of the poems in these collections was written later than that date, there are any number of them that *may* have been written later and in regard to which we cannot ascertain any date at all. It is a pure begging of the question to determine the date of a collection of miscellaneous pieces in this way.

It may be asked how it accounts for the omission of the epitaph on Prince Henry.[1] My answer is that I do not think we are justified in accepting that poem as Jonson's; Gifford's verdict seems to me to be substantially correct.

How then about the omission of the lines to Somerset on his marriage? It is perfectly clear why Jonson in 1616 should not care to

[1] *Notes and Queries, loc. cit.*

print those lines. But it is perfectly possible at the same time that they were intended to be published and that when the murder of Overbury became known in 1615 Jonson canceled them and substituted Epigram 65 in their place. I do not assert this as a fact, or even as probable, but there is nothing to prove the supposition absurd or inadmissible.

The only really serious problem, in short, is the omission of *Bartholomew Fair*. No doubt, this is difficult to explain, but the position taken by Fleay and Simpson does not account for it, unless they are prepared to go to the length of asserting that the volume was actually in type by the time that play was written. If not, why should the play have been left out? If so, why should publication be delayed? A reasonable explanation of the omission is that the play was very likely a good drawing card, and that it was thought unwise to print it so soon.

However, I do not see that I am called upon to account for all such omissions. It is sufficient to point out that the plausible theory of Fleay and Simpson is at present only a plausible theory, and that we may explain the failure of the epigrams to appear in 1612 without calling upon Prince Henry's death to assist us.

Thirdly, this pamphlet gives us a clear insight into the character of Jonson's life-long interest in theology and in the argumentative struggle constantly going on between the Roman and Protestant churches. Jonson became a Catholic in 1598; how literally we are to take Drummond's statement that he remained "12 years a Papist" we cannot of course tell, but it is doubtless practically accurate, though it does not enable us to determine the day and hour when he abandoned that faith. It is certain enough, however, that from this document we learn the exact character both of his adoption of Catholicism and of his reconversion. Both were of a purely intellectual nature, the fruit, that is, of purely intellectual processes, so far as such things can be. One need not for a moment deny that he was a man, as Gifford says, of deep religious feeling. There is evidence enough for that. But there is no evidence that he had an instinctive preference for either form of Christianity, that he was led in either conversion by any feeling that either church would more thoroughly satisfy his emotional nature, that his convictions were at

all influenced by the need of an authoritative church, by a longing for Christian unity, by an aesthetic appreciation of Catholic ritual, or in fact by any of the multifarious emotional appeals that Catholicism has made and makes to many men of many natures. There is, in other words, not the least hint of the sentimentalist or the mystic. When Jonson was in prison in 1598, he took his religion "on trust." That is to say, he felt himself unable to disprove the statement of the priest that the logical interpretation of the biblical text supported the Catholic claim. When he came to examine the matter for himself, and at length, this view of the case ceased to give him intellectual satisfaction, and he became once more a Protestant. It was discussions of the general type of that contained in our pamphlet, to many of which he must have listened and in many of which he must have taken a share, that carried weight and turned the scale.

Thus I demonstrate it: *By hic calix* you meane *hic sanguis:* but *sanguis Christi* is not *proprie testamentum.*

Negatur minor, saith D. Smith.

Probatur (quoth M. Featly,) No substantiall part of the Testator is properly his Testament: But the blood of Christ is a substantiall part of the Testator: *Ergo,* it is not properly his last Will and Testament.

In his Syllogisme D. Smith denyed the Major, affirming, that if any man should signe any thing with his blood, that blood being an authenticall signe of his Will, might be properly called his Testament.[1]

Whether such argument, thoroughly alien as it is to the temper of the present day and resting as it does upon obviously false analogies, be likely to avail much for salvation, everyone must decide for himself. We must at the same time admit that it is the kind of argument that determined whether Jonson was or was not to remain a Catholic.[2]

Perhaps it will not be out of place to speak here of other tantalizing glimpses into his intellectual life at this period that are afforded by two MS trifles that I have never seen referred to.

The first has to do with a letter to Jonson by Joseph Webbe, concerning whom see *D.N.B.* It is a very long letter in Sl. 1466 ff.,

[1] P. 302.

[2] Castelain, who has a somewhat different explanation of Jonson's reconversion and one that seems to me out of harmony with the poet's character (*Ben Jonson,* 1907, 124, note) neatly disposes of the inconvenient "12 years" by supposing that there may have been a misreading of XII for VII.

203 f., relating to a treatise on Latin versification of which Webbe was the author. A Latin version of the letter in a different hand is in the same MS, 354–72.

F. 203. "A Letter breefly touching the large extent & infinite use, of yt little booke called Entheatus Materialis primus, lately written by ye Author of yt booke, to his deare & lovinge frend Mr. Benjamin Johnson. And his anwere." [*Sic.* Unfortunately the answer of Jonson is not in the MS, and the title-page of the Latin version of the letter makes no mention of it.]

F. 204. "Mr. Benjamin Johnson, eldest sonne of our Brittaine muses: J. W. wisheth Bayes; a marble, or some brasen statua; & perpetuall memory.

"Deare Brother

"Within ye circuite of my best acquaintance, I find none of Apollo's Judges to grace more ye seate of his Justice either with gravity of person, multiciplicitie of reading, or depht of understanding; than you doe. Nor find I any, from w'm I should more joyfull receive applause for good; or more patiently tollerate, rebuke for ill; than from ye doome of yours discretion. Give mee therefore leave to intreate none but you* to lift the Bilance betweene my last booke, & some ill Savouring breath of Malice, now call'd emulation; &, to make a just report of both theyre valewes."

*Enth: mat: 1. us.

Webbe then goes on to complain of the envious strictures that have been passed upon his work, to ask Jonson to judge between him and his critics, to give a complex mathematical demonstration of the principle of his book, and at length to conclude—

"Though much more may be sayde in ye behalfe of this little booke: yet let this suffice for ye present. And let report & it bee judg'd by your opinion. Meane while I rest.

[*sic*] Your devouted frend
Glassenbury house and brother
in Smithfield. Jan: Joseph. Webbe."
20, 1628 [-9]:

The work of which Webbe speaks was entitled *Usus et Authoritas sive Entheatus*, etc., 1626. It dealt chiefly with the pentameter and hexameter, though the principles were applicable to all forms of versification, and apparently to any language. It aroused some controversy, of which there are many traces in the MS, the greater part of which is taken up with pieces in one way and another bearing on it. Arber, *Transcript*, V, lviii, says that Joseph Webbe was granted

a patent "for the teaching of the languages after a newe sort by him devised, and alsoe the printing of the bookes and selling them," but the date of the patent is not given, and it apparently refers to other related enterprises on the part of Webbe (see *D.N.B.*).

In the same MS, f. 16, is the following, probably in the hand of Webbe:

Coppie of a noate of Mr. Morleys. had fro Oxford. Whereas Caleb Morley Mr of Arts & sometymes fellowe of Baliel Colledg in ye Universitie of Oxon hath intended & laboured a speedie and certaine Course for ye attaying & retayninge of languages & other partes of good literature purposed for ye generall ease & benifit of ye studious in either kinde. We whose names are under written & of ye same Universitie purpose & promise our best furtherance & assistance therein on his behalfe by our Countenance & Labours to our powers not onlie to welcome but also to helpe such a labour pretended for ours provided that any Contribution of money from us be alwayes excepted."

I could not decipher all of the signatures, which are of course not originals. There are fourteen of them in all, and they belong to Sir Robert Cotton, Sir Henry Spilman, Dr. Rives (?) Advoc. Regis, Dr. Duck, Cancillar, Londi., Dr. Baskevile, Med. Dr., Dr. Andrews, Med. Dr., Mr. S———, Theolog., Mr. Adsworth (?), Theolog., Mr. Selden, Gentl., Mr. Benjam. Johnson, Mr. Mathew Bust, Mr. of Eaton School, Mr. Farnaby, Heynes (?), Mr. Robinson Scholar of Winchester, S.

These names do not require much comment. I believe Dr. Andrews is the Dr. Andrewes whose poems are in *Harl.* 4955. Mr. Robinson is probably the Edward Robinson elected to Winchester in 1622, as the William Robinson of 1627 would be too young. The date of the note is between 1628 and 1630, for Duck did not become chancelor of the diocese of London until 1628 or shortly after, whereas Matthew Bust was Master of Eton from 1611 to 1630.

About Caleb Morley little is known. From the printed register of the University and from Foster's *Alumni Oxonienses*, we find that he matriculated 5 March 1602, aged 16, proceeded B.A. 26 October, 1605, and M.A. 20th June, 1611, and became Rector of Stalbridge, Dorset, in 1616. According to Hutchin's *History of Dorset*, 111, 681, his successor was instituted in 1621; apparently, Morley must have been deprived as the result of the suit against him of which we find

some particulars in the *Calendar of State Papers, Dom.*, under November 24, 1619, May 10, 1620, and December ?, 1621. On October 28, 1624, Conway writes to the bishop of London saying that "the King wishes his opinion on a new alphabet invented by Mr. Morley, a minister, for the more easy attaining of languages, for the sole printing and publishing of which he requests a patent." On March 6, 1627, there is a grant "to Caleb Morley, of the sole right, for 21 years, of printing and publishing a New Method for the Help of Memory and grounding of Scholars in several languages." This patent is also given by Arber, *Transcript*, V, lviii, but without date. I have not been able to find that Morley published anything on the subject, but there is an unsigned account of a newly invented alphabet in this same MS which is very likely his. If so, it conveys a high estimate of his competence, for it is founded on the soundest principles, though they may not always be properly carried out.

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